3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

[v. 234]

## XIII

# CONSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL FORMS

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QUITE aside from its castes and the political separation of 1807–20, Haiti has always consisted of two nations, one living in and near the towns and so within reach of established government, the other rural and yet capable of ordering its own affairs by folk rules without much actual governmental machinery. It is through the former that Haiti has a political history. Indeed, one is tempted to say that more than half the people have continually got along without any government whatever of a formal sort, for being peaceably inclined they have found custom and usage [669] sufficient for their needs. These people have been rarely disturbed by the state's rulers; revolutionary chieftains alone have found it worth their while to stir up the country folk to an active interest in politics.

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The formal subdivisions of Haiti have been, through most of its history, three: the *commune*, roughly corresponding to the American township; the *arrondissement*, a group of communes, just as the American county is a group of townships; and the *département*, comprising several arrondissements. All three terms were borrowed from France, although their significance was altered when applied to the Haitian scene.

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In the days of Toussaint, Dessalines, and Christophe, the government had owned vast plantations which were under the control of the military. Pétion and Boyer instituted the commune by combining numerous estates and farms into a group likewise to be controlled by soldiers. Until the American Occupation the police system of the country was military, with ordinary soldiers keeping order and making arrests when necessary. Since few people are less given to disorder than the Haitian peasants, the task of keeping order was not a serious one; indeed, soldiers were frequently stationed among their friends and relatives, who never thought of them as police. It some- [293] times happened, however, that soldiers were assigned to other parts of the country, where they swaggered about with their *cocomacaques* (heavy-jointed canes), using these or the flat of their swords to enforce their often arbitrary commands.

In every commune recognized by the state was an important